Partitive in negative contexts: a microvariationist analysis

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In this work we will take into account the distribution of pseudo-partitive objects (PPOs: PP objects headed by *di* 'of' or partitive clitic objects) in negative contexts in the Northern Italian Dialects (NIDs) and will provide a detailed description of their distribution. Our aim is to establish an implicational scale on the basis of geographic variation which can then be tested on the historical evolution of partitive articles in French and other genetically and non-genetically related languages. In particular, we will start from the pretty standard assumption that dialectal variation works the same as diachronic variation, and if so, the NIDs can be used in a way similar to a preceding step in the evolution of French. On the one hand, it is clear that in the NIDs the so called partitive article is not compositional in the sense assumed by Chierchia (1998) for (his) standard Italian (see Garzonio & Poletto (2014)). It is also rather clear that NIDs (maybe with the exception of the Franco-Provencal varieties) do not have such an extended system of PPOs like modern French. This is the reason why, in our view, NIDs qualify as the best testing ground to find out how PPOs distribute and evolve. Our investigation goes in two steps: we will first provide the results of a corpus study in the ASIt data base to determine which factors are relevant to the distribution of PPOs and the selection of dialects to be investigated through field work. In the ASIt data base, two types of patterns appear:

a) North Western dialects (Ligurian and Piedmontese) have PPs in negative contexts (although Battye (1989) reports cases of quantificational contexts in Genoese, we did not find them in the data base):

(1) Un   ti   lessi mai ***di***   libri.   (Borghetto di Vara, La Spezia)
      not   you= read.2sg never of-the books
      'You never read books.'

b) Rhaetoromance varieties display PPOs in quantificational contexts, and specifically with *wh-*items.

(2) Tan   ***de***   smalz meteste   pa   tla   turte? (S. Leonardo, Bolzano)
      how much   of   butter put.sg=you   INT   in-the cake
      'How much butter do you use for the cake?'

The results of the corpus study lead us to concentrate on PPOs licenced by sentential negation since this is the geographically the most widespread pattern and, basing on the variation found in the ASIt, we consider two conditions for a new fieldwork study, namely:

a) The distribution of PPOs with singular, mass and plural nouns. In particular we intend to show whether the implicational scale starts from either mass, singular or plural nouns and how it works (and how particular cases like collective nouns (like *frutta* 'some fruit') work). (3) shows that within the same dialect a collective noun and a plural differ with respect to the possibility of having a partitive PP.

(3)　　a.　　Nu　　ti　　catti　moi　***de*** meire.　　　(Finale Ligure, Savona)
　　　　　　　　not　　you=　buy.s2g　never　of-the apples
　　　　　　　　'You never buy apples.'
　　　　b.　　I　　nun　　catan　moi　　fruta.
　　　　　　　　they=　not　　buy.3pl　　　never　fruit
　　　　　　　　'They never buy any fruit.'

On the other hand, (4) shows that the same type of noun tolerates the PP or not, with or without the definite article depending on the dialect.

(4)　　a.　　A　　n'mangia　　mai　***dra*** fruta　　sa matotta.　　(Carcare, Savona)
　　　　　　　　CLIT　not=eats　　　　never　of-the fruit　　that girl
　　　　b.　　Quelle figgie　e nu mangie　mei　***de*** fruta　　　　　　(Casarza, Genova)
　　　　　　　　that　girl　she=not=eats　never　of fruit
　　　　c.　　A　　nu mangia　　moi　　fruta,　cuella suena　　(FinaleLigure, Savona)
　　　　　　　　CLIT　not eats　　　　　　never　fruit　that girl
　　　　　　　　'That girl never eats fruit.'

b) The presence/absence of the definite article conflated with the preposition in the three types of nouns (countable singular, countable plural and mass). The ASIt data base already shows that there are several cases of optionality but again we want to establish whether the article occurs in either plural, singular or mass nouns first and whether there is any implicational scale to be observed. Notice also that in some dialects negation can trigger partitive encoding of a singular definite object (Manzini and Savoia 2011).

(5)　　　　nə　　camɐn mia　***d ɘu*** te friɐl.　　　(Quarna Sopra, Verbania)
　　　　　　not　　call.3pl not　　of the your brother
　　　　　　'They do not call your brother.'

The results of our field work will provide us with new insights concerning the internal syntax of PPOs and their relation to negation, which we will show to be much more intimate than assumed until now.

References

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